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Inclusive Assessment Practices for Students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Systematic Review of CBSE and NIOS Frameworks

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Abstract

The current systematic literature review assesses the effectiveness of examination provisions that are awarded to students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities under the umbrella of CBSE and NIOS systems in India. The present systematic review study seeks to critically evaluate the role of these provisions towards enabling equal assessment practices, access to academic opportunities, and inclusion of students with disabilities in educational activities.

The research adopted the approach of systematic reviews through applying PRISMA 2020 criteria. Research materials used in the study were obtained from databases including Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Springer Link, and even archives concerning CBSE and NIOS policies within the period from 2000 to 2025. A total of 82 documents have been identified through inclusion and exclusion criteria. Thematic analysis was used to analyze literature on exam accommodations, accessibility, challenges faced, and assessment.

It was observed that the use of facilities like additional time, scribes, accessible test materials, the use of assistive technology, flexible subject selection, and alternative assessments has greatly helped improve educational participation and overcome assessment barriers faced by students with disabilities. In NIOS, learner-centered assessment practices were seen to be more flexible compared to CBSE, where standardized assessment practices were supported with supplementary facilities.

The findings of this paper demonstrate that examination accommodations are important tools for creating equality in education and fair assessments. There needs to be much more stress on the enforcement of policies, provision of technological tools, training of teachers, and application of the universal design for learning principles.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Examination Concessions, Visual Disability, Intellectual Disability, CBSE and NIOS

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

There is a lot of stress on inclusive education being a major human right concern in the world today especially after the introduction of the UNCRPD in 2006. It placed special emphasis on equality in education and assessment among learners with disabilities. The integration of children with disabilities in mainstream institutions has been recognized in India through various acts such as Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995, Right to Education Act of 2009, Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016, and NEP 2020. The common thread among all these acts is the fact that children with disabilities must participate in mainstream schools and be evaluated (Poonam & Sangwan, 2011; Dey & Bika, 2023).

Aspects like examinations and assessment processes are highly significant in deciding students' academic career paths and opportunities. However, examination formats have been highly discriminatory to those suffering from some form of disability since the examination process is always intended for typically growing students. This has created challenges for students with visual impairment because they face problems such as inaccessible exam questionnaires, no technology help, insufficient scribes, and exams which are timed and based entirely on the visual process (Miyachi, 2020). Intellectual and Developmental disabilities also poses some unique challenges when it comes to examination preparation and performance (Krämer, Möller, & Zimmermann, 2021).

In an attempt to correct such disparities, examination provisions have been put in place internationally and nationally. The examination provisions for CWSN concerned with adjustments and aids intended to help in ensuring fairness in the examination process without compromising on the learning outcome. Some of the concessions include provision for additional time, aid from scribes or readers, exemption from certain subjects, alternative methods of assessment, use of technology, provision for alternative examination format and alternative examination arrangements. These concessions contribute to better performance if used efficiently, according to studies conducted by Bardin and Lewis (2008); Jessup et al. (2008); and Miyachi (2020).

In India, two prominent examination boards, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) have developed systems which help children with special needs in their examinations. The CBSE has periodically reviewed its schemes to provide concessions and exemptions to enable inclusiveness in education, offering such conveniences as extra time, computer facilities, scribes, freedom in the selection of subjects, and exemption from studying some languages. The NIOS board, being an open and flexible learning institution, provides more extensive concessions, such as conducting examinations upon demand and adopting a student-focused learning and evaluation process. However, there are still several issues associated with the implementation of the above-said schemes.

Provisions effectiveness is currently one of the emerging concerns for education scholars and researchers in disability studies. According to the available literature, concessions should be effective insofar as they align with the learner's special needs and applied consistently (Miyachi, 2020). Nevertheless, studies investigating the extent to which examinations

concessions are effective in India still remain scattered. While there are many studies on inclusive teaching techniques, teacher attitudes, accessibility challenges, and assessment barriers, less attention has been paid to examining whether such concessions actually help to create a fair, independent learning environment, enhance academic performance, and improve psychological well-being (Pradhan & Gochhayat, 2023).

There are also additional theoretical frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and social models of disability that lend further credence to the importance of having a flexible assessment system in place. According to the theory of UDL, it is important for educational settings to design their learning environment to suit diverse learners rather than adjusting individual learners to fit the environment. Similarly, social models of disability emphasize that obstacles come about due to inaccessibility of the system and discrimination. Moreover, globalization and technology have changed methods of testing education around the world. Computer-based testing, assistive technology, text-to-speech tools, Braille-enabled technology, and artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted support systems have provided many opportunities in making assessment accessible to everyone. But there is a large disparity between those implementing these strategies and others in developing countries like India. Therefore, assessing the efficacy of present concession systems is crucial at this stage.

1.2 Purpose of the Review

"The purpose of conducting this systematic literature review is to examine the effectiveness of examination provisions provided to the students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the contexts of CBSE and NIOS." The objective of the current systematic literature review is to assess the efficacy of the examination concession in terms of fairness, achievement, and surmounting the hurdles of assessment process."

The following research questions have been taken into account in the process of conducting the literature review:

1. Which kind of examination concession is offered by CBSE and NIOS to students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities?
2. Are there any problems faced during the process of giving examination concessions?
3. What kind of impact do these examination provisions have on the academic inclusion of students?
4. In what way beneficial and equitable are these examinations according to students, teachers, parents, and educators?
5. What are the constraints of the existing policy?

Other areas explored in the literature include issues relating to accessibility, educational equity, readiness of institutions, psychological aspects of accommodations, and the nexus between inclusion policy and assessment procedures.

1.3 Outline of Literature Review

Organization of this review paper is divided into various sections. After the introduction, there will be a methodological discussion which includes the rationale behind the selection of literature for study. In the methodology, the rationale behind the criteria adopted in examining the policy, documents, and guidelines related to examination concession and

inclusion in assessment will be discussed. The main body of this review will include a synthesis of literature on issues related to disability, educational provisions, and assessment practices from India and other countries as well as comparative analysis between both educational boards.

The review mostly considers academic work produced between the years 2000 and 2025, which include articles in journals, policies, education guidelines, disabilities studies, and other government literature. Special consideration has been given to cases involving Indian education, although some studies outside India have also been considered for their theoretical value.

However, despite the attempt to provide an overview of existing research, some limitations exist. First, the use of only secondary literature and publications written in English limits the study in terms of relevant regional studies and institutional literature that is not available for publishing. Furthermore, since there is a lack of empirical studies on the comparison of CBSE and NIOS provisions schemes, the results were drawn from policy analysis and theme-based synthesis.

Nonetheless, this review makes an important contribution to the current discourse on inclusive assessment by analyzing the role of examination provisions in the education of students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

2. Main Body

2.1 Methodology of the Review

The systematic review research methodology was adopted, by undertaking the research using the *PRISMA 2020* framework that assesses the effectiveness of examinations that were undertaken by students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities through the CBSE and NIOS curriculums. This methodology is opted due to the evidence-based nature of it; this means that the right process for collecting evidence will be obtained through this methodology.

2.2 Research Design

To understand thoroughly the issue of examination provision and the effectiveness thereof, a systematic review approach was adopted in which information from various sources like empirical studies, policies, theoretical studies, government documents, and international regulations was combined. This approach facilitated the incorporation of research using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, along with consideration of educational and disability legislation in India.

2.3 Search Strategy

A number of exhaustive literature searches have been carried out via different online academic databases and institutional repositories in order to retrieve articles which are published during the span of years 2000 to 2025. This particular timeline was chosen based on the increasing importance of inclusive education due to the disability rights movement, alongside various other policy changes that have occurred in India such as the Right to

Education Act of 2009, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016, and the National Education Policy 2020.

The following electronic databases were systematically searched:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- JSTOR
- PubMed
- Google Scholar
- SpringerLink
- Taylor & Francis Online
- Sage Journals
- Shodhganga
- NCERT and NIEPA repositories
- CBSE and NIOS official policy archives

In addition, the literature comprised reports from government ministries, policy briefs, documents from disabilities commissions, UNESCO reports, and other non-refereed materials.

2.4 Search Keywords

The following is a list of search keywords, combined using Boolean operators and truncations, which helped to retrieve a maximum amount of literature:

- “Examination concessions”
- “Assessment accommodations”
- “Inclusive assessment”
- “Visual disability”
- “Blind students”
- “Intellectual disability”
- “Learning disabilities”
- “Educational inclusion”
- “Accessible examinations”
- “CBSE disability concessions”
- “NIOS accommodations”
- “Scribe facility”
- “Extra time in examinations”
- “Universal Design for Learning”
- “Inclusive education in India”
- “Disability and assessment”
- “Special educational needs”
- “Alternative assessment methods”

Search strings were modified according to the indexing patterns and requirements of each database.

2.5 Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selection of literature for review are as follows:

1. Works published from the year 2000 to 2025.
2. Articles in journals, proceedings of conference, policy writings, dissertation works, and government writings.
3. Literature on accommodations in tests, testing accommodations, and inclusive testing/assessments.
4. Literature related to students with visual impairment, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
5. Literature in books, articles, journals, and any form of literature related to CBSE, NIOS, Inclusive Education in India, and any other international literature in general.
6. Literature written in English language.
7. Research papers which can be qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods on educational testing/assessment.

2.6 Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria for this study included:

1. Research that focused solely on physical disabilities without mentioning test accommodation.
2. Those which were not relevant to testing or educational assessments.
3. Theories and research work conducted at higher or vocational institutions without implications for school education.
4. Duplicate works.
5. Research whose methodologies and academic significance could not be ascertained.
6. Essays lacking empirical and policy significance.

2.7 Screening and Selection Process

The search for literature was done by following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The total number of literature found using searches in the database and hand searching was 1,240. After removing the duplicates, there were 978 articles screened through titles and abstracts. All articles which did not meet the eligibility criteria were excluded from the study.

After the above stage, 214 articles were reviewed using their full-text papers. Eventually, only 82 articles were used for this research. These articles include empirical studies, literature reviews, government policies, disability law, and international policy on assessment inclusivity.

The PRISMA flow process can be summarized as follows:

1. Identification of studies through databases and institutional sources.
2. Removal of duplicate records.
3. Title and abstract screening.

4. Full-text assessment for eligibility.
5. Final inclusion of relevant studies for qualitative synthesis.

2.8 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from the selected studies were systematically extracted using a structured review matrix.

The following information was recorded:

- Author(s) and publication year
- Country and educational context
- Research objectives
- Study design and methodology
- Type of disability examined
- Nature of examination concessions
- Key findings
- Limitations and recommendations

Thematic analysis was used in this process to derive themes such as accessibility, implementation of policies, effectiveness of accommodations, teachers' readiness, technology, psychological issues, assessment fairness, and institutional problems.

In addition, a comparative policy analysis of CBSE and NIOS approaches has been performed to identify variations regarding flexibility, inclusiveness, implementation mechanisms, and learner-centered practices.

2.9 Reliability and Validity

The goal of achieving the enhanced level of reliability and validity was achieved due to the use of PRISMA framework for the review along with the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Cross checking of articles along with repeated screenings helped solve the issue of selection bias. Triangulation of different sources allowed us to reach a balanced conclusion.

Table 1: PRISMA Screening and Selection Process

Stage	Number of Records
Records identified through database searching	1,240
Duplicate records removed	262
Records screened (title and abstract)	978
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	214
Studies excluded after full-text review	128
Final studies included in synthesis	82

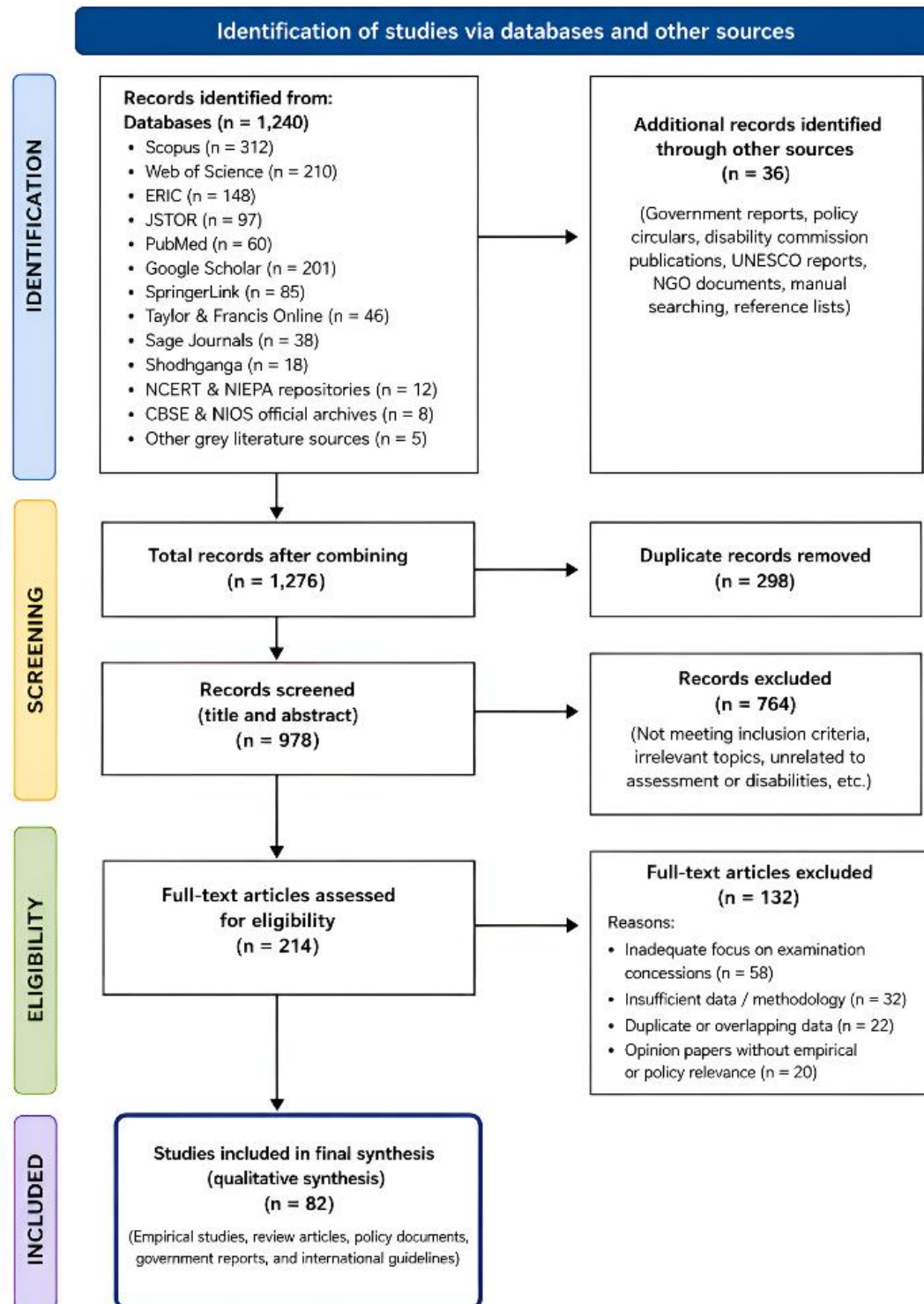
Table 2: Major Themes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

Theme	Focus Area
Accessibility in Assessment	Braille papers, digital accessibility, scribes
Policy Implementation	Institutional execution of concession policies
Inclusive Educational Practices	Equitable participation and learner support
Teacher Preparedness	Awareness and training regarding accommodations
Technological Support	Assistive devices and digital assessment tools
Psychological Impact	Anxiety reduction, confidence, motivation
Institutional Challenges	Infrastructure, procedural delays, resource limitations
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	Flexible and learner-centered assessment systems

Table 3: Comparative Features of CBSE and NIOS Examination Concessions

Feature	CBSE	NIOS
Examination Structure	Standardized board examination system	Flexible open schooling system
Extra Time Provision	Available	Available
Scribe Facility	Available with regulations	Available with greater flexibility
Assistive Technology Use	Limited but expanding	Comparatively flexible
Subject Flexibility	Partial exemptions	Broader curriculum flexibility
Assessment Approach	Conventional standardized evaluation	Learner-centered and adaptable
On-Demand Examinations	Not available	Available
Accessibility Orientation	Accommodation-based	Flexible inclusive model

PRISMA 2020 FLOW DIAGRAM FOR SYSTEMATIC REVIEW



Note: The numbers are based on the search conducted for literature published between 2000 and 2025.

Figure 1

2.10 Summary of Literature

Research in this topic reveals that there is increasing awareness around the globe regarding the requirement to provide equal learning opportunities for students with disabilities. The current body of literature centers mainly on four main topics: policies regarding inclusive education, the efficiency of examination accommodations, implementation difficulties, and new methods of inclusive assessment.

Inclusive Education and Disability Rights

The concept of examination provisions is based on the theories of inclusive education and disability rights laws. As stated by UNESCO (2009), an equitable education system entails provision of accessible learning and assessment settings for all students. On the other hand, UNCRPD (2006) has acknowledged that provision of reasonable accommodations is imperative for educational institutions for facilitating barrier-free assessment procedures.

Examples of inclusive education policy development in India include the implementation of schemes such as IEDC, SSAB, RPWD Act 2016, and NEP 2020. According to researchers like Singal (2010) and Das et al. (2013), although there have been notable developments with respect to inclusive education policies in the country, their implementation remains a problem for several reasons.

Examination Accommodations for Students with Visual Impairment

Scholars who have investigated the effects of accommodations among individuals with visual impairments have established that these accommodations lead to higher levels of participation in learning and improved self-confidence (Miyauchi, 2020). For instance, according to the research by Douglas et al. (2012), students with visual impairments tend to have high performances when their assessments are customized.

Several Indian studies have focused on constant hindrances encountered by students with visual impairment during mainstream boards' exams, such as scarcity of trained scribes, late delivery of accessible literature, and varying interpretations of concessions by schools and exam halls.

CBSE has provided an increasingly wide range of concessions to visually impaired students, including computer use, calculator use based on certain conditions, and exemption from learning third languages. Yet studies indicate poor awareness about such facilities among school administration and teaching staff.

Examination Accommodations for students with Intellectual and developmental Disabilities

Scholarship examining the impact of intellectual disabilities shows the importance of using simple instructions, assessment tools, pacing, and functional assessment approaches. Intellectual disabilities can interfere with cognitive processes, memory, skills development, and conceptual abilities, hence making standard examination approaches poor indicators of learning outcomes.

According to Krämer et al. (2021), exam-based assessment systems that solely rely on assessing written work are discriminatory towards student with intellectual disability even if they have developed skills and concepts. Examination anxiety and strict time limits also impact students with intellectual disability significantly.

There have been many studies conducted on NIOS as it has a very flexible form of evaluation. This includes having examinations when needed, modularized courses, individualized learning speeds, and adjustments for the learners. This program has been identified as being very adaptable for different situations.

Universal Design for Learning and Inclusive Assessment

Inclusive assessment research has been guided by the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is a prevailing theory. UDL requires multiple modes of representation, action, and engagement for diverse students. Researchers have stated that exam concessions need to progress from reactive accommodation to proactive inclusion in the assessment process.

The emergence of new technologies such as screen readers, digital exams, voice-to-text programs, and AI-based tools that enhance accessibility have become a topic of contemporary literature on reducing assessment barriers.

2.11 Analysis and Critical Evaluation

The above review of literature has shown considerable consensus on the need for testing accommodations to ensure educational equity. The majority of research articles state that extra time, use of scribes, format flexibility, and other types of accommodations have positive effects on students' self-confidence, participation, and academic success. Nevertheless, there are numerous weaknesses in the research conducted thus far.

Strengths of Existing Literature

- Clear focus on rights-based approach to education.
- Trend towards interdisciplinarity in studying education psychology and disability studies.
- Attention to the use of technology as a remedy.
- Conducting comparative studies internationally on accommodation.

Weaknesses and Limitations

While there have been advancements in policy, empirical data regarding the efficacy of examination concessions is limited, especially in the case of India. Studies conducted have used very small samples, qualitative interviews, or analysis of policies without conducting longitudinal or larger-scale empirical research.

There is also an issue with excessive focus on policies while overlooking implementation in reality. While some studies highlight policy concessions, they do not explore whether the concessions are actually implemented when it comes to examination time.

The studies dealing with intellectual disabilities lag behind the studies focusing on visual impairment. Rural schools, financially deprived students, and regional disparity in education are other areas which require further attention in the future.

2.12 Research Gaps

These include:

- Few comparative studies comparing CBSE and NIOS concession systems.
- Lack of longitudinal studies focusing on academic performance over time.
- Student-oriented literature that focuses on their perspective and experience.

- Less information about teacher readiness and institutional accountability.
- Little information about digital access to and assessment in examinations.

2.13 Emerging Trends

Technology-enhanced inclusive assessment, competency-based evaluation, and Universal Design for Learning have become prominent trends in the contemporary research. Moreover, the issue of student mental well-being, including examination anxiety, has received increased attention.

2.14 Comparison and Synthesis

Similarities and differences emerge in comparing CBSE and NIOS examination systems.

The CBSE system is relatively fixed in terms of the mainstream examination framework, wherein concession serves as an auxiliary to the examination system. Although CBSE provides a wide range of accommodations, the extent of its application varies according to the understanding of each school administration.

However, NIOS represents the flexible perspective on learner-centered education. The open schooling system provided by NIOS makes it possible to achieve flexibility in pace, methods of assessment, and accommodation.

However, there is a concern that too much flexibility could pose problems regarding the matter of standards and the comparability of achievements. In contrast, high-standardized programs could lead to exclusion despite providing accommodation opportunities.

In most literature on the topic, it is agreed that examinations with accommodations can be effective if used properly. However, there are still disagreements among authors about the degree to which accommodations are enough to achieve equity without affecting assessment validity.

While some researchers call for the implementation of individual accommodations suited for particular individuals' needs, others propose a universal approach, which consists of designing assessments that accommodate all learners. This discussion shows the fundamental difference between an accommodation approach and a universal design approach in inclusive education.

From the synthesis of research findings, one learns that accommodations alone do not ensure educational inclusion. For the former to be successful, there needs to be adequate institutional support, teacher knowledge, technological assistance, understanding of policies, and a positive socio-cultural attitude towards students with disabilities.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Major Findings

This review systematically explores the use of examination provisions for Students with Visual Impairment and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the CBSE framework and the NIOS framework. The review integrates information collected from policy documents, research studies, theories, and other inclusive education frameworks worldwide, to understand the impact of such concessions on learning accessibility and equity.

From this review, it was found out that provisions during examinations are vital tools used to reduce barriers in education and implement inclusive examinations. The use of accommodations, which includes extended time allocation, scribes, provision of accessible examination papers, the usage of technology, exemption from certain subjects, alternative means of assessing abilities, among others, plays an important role in ensuring increased access and confidence levels among learners with disabilities. According to studies, when proper accommodation measures are put in place, it becomes easier for students with disabilities to showcase what they know rather than being limited by barriers brought about by disabilities.

The findings also showed that both CBSE and NIOS have made substantial strides towards aligning their examination programs with inclusive education approaches as well as disability laws. CBSE has been able to incorporate concession schemes in response to legislative requirements on an international and national level, while NIOS has established relatively flexible learner-oriented models of assessments. It is worth noting that NIOS is a more flexible scheme, especially considering that it follows an open school approach.

Yet, despite all these developments in terms of policies, it was revealed that there are still issues in the implementation stage that prevent efficient use of examination accommodations. These issues included inconsistency in the implementation of policies among different schools and testing sites, lack of awareness, inadequacy of qualified scribes, absence of technology, as well as inefficiencies within procedures that hinder students' ability to access accommodation facilities.

In addition to this, the review showed that there is a much smaller number of studies conducted on intellectual disabilities when compared to those conducted on visually impaired students. This is due to the current testing approach in place, which relies on traditional testing methods, thus failing to test their skills. It was concluded that competency-based assessment systems were needed.

In addition to this, another important discovery made through the literature review was the increasing importance of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and assistive technology approaches to inclusive assessments. Modern education research is calling for proactive development of accessible assessments instead of waiting for students to need accommodations. The above-stated methods include computerized exams, screen reading applications, speech recognition programs, Braille-compatible equipment, and adaptive software powered by artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, it should be noted that exam accommodations are not only instruments but an essential component of educational equality. In order to be implemented effectively, they need to be accompanied by availability and correct implementation along with other elements like institutional preparedness, teacher preparation, and societal acceptance of disabilities.

3.2 Implications

1. The review provides justification for the social model of disability and the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as barriers exist due to inaccessible systems and not the impairment itself.

2. Educational organizations require preparedness through proper teacher preparation, disability sensitivity, and administration of coordinated measures to ensure accommodation during exams.
3. Assistive technology is important for ensuring inclusion in assessments.
4. Policymakers need to develop better monitoring and periodic evaluations of examination concession policies within organizations.
5. Inclusive assessment requires moving away from traditional timed tests towards other forms such as competency assessment and project assessments.

3.3 Recommendations

1. The CBSE and NIOS ought to create an acceptable protocol that would guarantee that all schools and exam centers offer such provisions consistently.
2. Awareness training sessions regarding disabilities and accommodations for them must be conducted on a regular basis for teachers, invigilators, and school administrators.
3. Efforts must be made to increase investments in assistive technology such as screen readers, braille readers, and computer-based software that would help the children with special need to take their exams.
4. Future research must emphasize empirical studies, rural areas, technology-oriented access, and experiences of disability students.

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